What a Life

This summer I took an online Creative Writing course through Ivy Tech. The class challenged me in ways I would never have expected. Not only did I become a better writer, but I became a better person as well. This was due to being forced to put all my thoughts, ideas, feelings, what have you, in writing for the rest of the class to see. We wrote five main papers, all having to do with personal experiences. We were given free reing to write about whatever moved us. For my last paper, I wrote about a very life changing experience, one that I often have a hard time talking about out loud. But, knowing that I’d never see the people who were about to read my piece, I wrote with complete wreckless abandon.

The piece was a narrative story about my relationship with my father and the recent obstacles I’ve been forced to overcome in dealing with his inability to see me as his daughter rather than my mother, his ex-wife. My writing process for this piece, unlike the others I wrote in that class, consisted of one surprisingly short amount of time. I sat down at my laptop, started with an intriguing first sentence, everything else just poured out of me like words I had been keeping in for so long and were FINALLY able to escape. I cried a few times, going back to the emails you will find are a vital part of this paper, reading them with bitterness, anger, and fury.

It all started by describing what life was like for me as a kid. This particular issue wasn’t easy for me to write. I sat on my couch thinking, “Where in the world do I even begin?” My father wasn’t around a whole lot, when I did see him it was for a short amount of time, not quality time I might add. Once middle school hit, he decided that he wanted a better relationship with me. Go figure, middle school, when most kids actually develop a social life full of sports games, birthdays parties, club meetings, and more! Then he and his current wife, Lisa, had a baby, my little sister, Lucy. At this point in the writing process, I really lost it. I wanted a sister for as long as I could remember, it took 20 years for her to get here but it was all worth the wait for me. So, for her sake, I did all I could to remain close with my father, as well as with her. All was fine and dandy until a few weeks after my 20th birthday when my mom broke the news to me that my dad/his attorney was demanding my presence in the court room for their most recent legal battle, all having to do with my college expenses and my dad’s wanting to emancipate me. Some may think it’s silly but to me, I was extremely hurt and insulted by this request. It fueled a fire in me I didn’t know I had. It brought up all the anger I had from him not being there for twelve years. It bothered me so much that I made a very impulsive decision, to write him telling him what I *really* thought of him. If you’ve ever met my father, you know he’s not the easiest man to talk to, especially in person. He’s truly hot headed and doesn’t let you get one word in. Knowing this and that I’d probably cry had I done it in person, I figured the best way to let everything out without being interrupted would be to email him. So I did. I told him how hurt I was, how angry he had made me for so many years, and that once their legal proceedings were over, I wanted nothing to do with him. Hours passed as I contemplated what was going too far and what was absolutely necessary. I felt the lump in the back of my throat slide down into my stomach as I pressed the send button on my yahoo account. Did I just make a mistake? Should I have told him off more? All I knew was that what I had just done could never be erased. His response – “Get over yourself” and “It’s not about you!” This particular bit of information was especially hard for me to share with my classmates though the piece. As I typed the words I had once read from my father, I shook my head again in disbelief. The tears started flowing. I knew what I was about to write would probably be my most remarkable work since I was filled with SO much emotion, so I kept typing, furiously I might add. I didn’t reread any sentences to see if they were grammatically correct, I didn’t want to lost my train of thought. I just kept going….for a whole ten minutes. Ten minutes doesn’t seem very long in the grand scheme of things but at the time, I felt like I could never stop.

I couldn’t believe his response. What kind of father tells his daughter that? This was just the beginning of a long, drawn out, chain of emails sent back and forth between us. I cried every time I’d read one of his emails, go over to my aunt’s house (his sister) and she’d console me, reassuring me that I didn’t deserve what was happening. She said, “as far as I’m concerned, what he’s doing to you by saying all these hurtful things is CHILD ABUSE!” I couldn’t have agreed more! But, I knew there was no changing him so I’d better just suck it up and get some thicker skin. At that point the worst part of it all for me was fearing that this quarrel would somehow affect the relationship I would form with my little sister, Lucy. So, after being excluded from Lucy’s baptism in March, I contacted my stepmom whom I have always been fond of and who tended to act as the mediator between my mom and dad throughout the years. She and I became very close so I didn’t even hesitate when I asked her to simply meet me for lunch so we could discuss some sort of arrangements to be made regarding Lucy. Though I wanted nothing to do with my dad, especially after the MANY hurtful words he said to me, I still wanted to be close to Lucy. Ideally, I was hoping to be able to pick Lucy up once a month for a little sisterly bonding time whether it be taking her to the zoo, children’s museum, or just taking a long walk together. Lisa said “no” and that her meeting with me would feel like a secret from my dad and that the two of them have no secrets. I was livid! Here I am trying to do what’s right and I can’t even do that because she’s convinced that she knows everything. Again, FALSE! Did she not recall the fact that she never knew he was a dead beat dad before she came around? After voicing to her how childish I thought it was of them not to invite me to the baptism she explained that many “family members” wanted to yell at/lecture me and that this couldn’t take place on “my Lucy’s special day.” Ugh! Through all of this mess with my dad, the rest of the family has been 100% behind ME, telling me that I’m doing what’s right and that I have no reason to be sorry. So I don’t know what “family members” think any of this is MY fault so in so many words I told Lisa HER family could kiss my ass. This pushed a button for my dad. He wrote me a simple email saying “I have never until now, regretted you.” I shared this message with the rest of my family AND my mother’s attorney. I’ve yet to respond to my dad, or shall I say “Chris.” I say this because since then, I only use his birth name when referring to him. To me the word “dad” should only be used when referring to someone admirable, someone who loves you UNCONDITIONALLY, and most importantly, someone who never gives up on their child. No one, including myself, aunts, uncles, or grandparents has seen him since that final statement. I have since then accepted the fact that unfortunately I will not be able to have a relationship with Lucy until she’s old enough to make her own decisions. I’ve also accepted that my “father” will never be my “dad.” What a life.

That paper made me face my fear of feeling exposed in my writing. I felt liberated as I finished typing the last sentence of that paper. I struggled with the thought that as soon as I submitted it, 30 plus people would then know the truth. I didn’t lead a perfectly happy life like most people think when they first meet me. I play off the fact that inside I ache a lot by putting on a smile and going on with my days like nothing is wrong. People were about to find out that NOTHING was okay, and that A LOT of things are wrong. I did it anyway. To hell with the fact that I wouldn’t be perceived as “normal,” if there even is such a thing.

I no longer fear my writing being read by others, I actually welcome it. I hope that through reading what I have to write, others will see that the art of writing can be more than just words written on paper, it can be a therapeutic tool as well. At least that’s what it has become for me. Writing that paper with complete carelessness as to what the people reading it might think of me as a writer, student, even a person as a whole, gave me a sense of closure. I never did re-read that piece for fear that I might just break, until now that is. Much to my surprise, I don’t cry anymore. But, reading the responses from the rest of my class then let me know that this kind of piece, such an emotional one, is what I have a knack for. It is because of this unfortunate experience in my life that I now know my passion in life, writing.